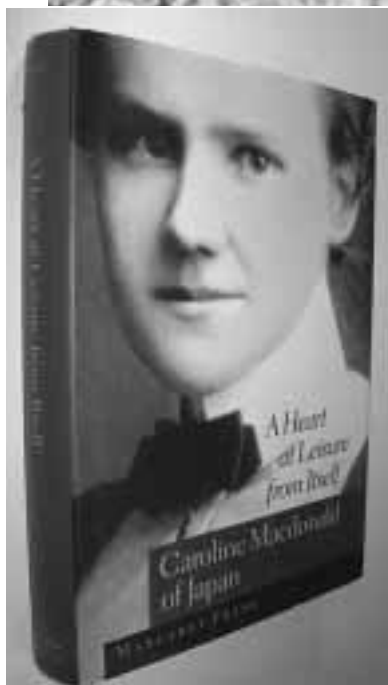


## Margaret Prang



Margaret Prang died in early January after a long and rich life, just a few days shy of her 92nd birthday. She spent her entire professional career at UBC, joining the Department of History in 1957 and retiring from it in 1986. In addition to her many scholarly achievements and her committed work as a popular, innovative teacher, she served twice as department head.

With her UBC colleague Walter Young, she founded *BC Studies* in 1968. She was president of the Canadian Historical Association in 1976-77 and she received an honorary doctorate from UBC in 1990. Active nationally in the historical profession as well, during the 1970s she served as the BC member of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

Margaret matured as an historian during the later 1940s and the 1950s, when the liberal internationalism of post-war Canada was in full flood, the history of nation building preoccupied

some of Canada's leading historians, and biography was a primary tool of historical inquiry. She brought to her professional life a childhood and youth lived in Ontario and Alberta, undergraduate study at United College in Winnipeg, and an active engagement with the Student Christian Movement at a time when social gospel precepts still strongly influenced the SCM. These varied influences moulded Margaret's early scholarly interests during her graduate years at the University of Toronto, as they continued to do throughout her entire career. They shaped her doctoral dissertation and the book that ensued from it, a biography of the Ontario lawyer, politician and leading Methodist layman Newton Rowell. And they remained influential in her biography of Caroline Macdonald, a Canadian YWCA worker who spent most of her career in Japan working for prison reform, which Margaret published after her retirement. At the same time she also caught the new wave of social and intellectual history that swept through the profession during the 1960s and 1970s, as her many articles and reviews indicate.

Beyond the university Margaret was active in community affairs, both locally and nationally. A committed social democrat and an active churchwoman, she lent her support to liberal causes throughout her life. In 1969 she was the second single woman in BC to adopt a child, a daughter, and later her daughter's sister, who enriched her life as she enriched theirs. She was one of the feminist leaders of her generation – at UBC, in the historical profession, and in the wider society of this country – and she led by example rather than precept.

Those of us who shared Margaret's friendship knew her openness and curiosity, her optimistic sense of human possibilities, her warmth and generosity, her great sense of fun, and her love of family. She described her biographic subject Caroline Macdonald as 'A Heart at Leisure from Itself'. The phrase seems equally appropriate of Margaret herself.

*Peter Ward*

Professor Emeritus of History  
Department of History  
University of British Columbia

## Varpu Lindström, 1948-2012



Varpu Lindström died peacefully on June 2012 after a remarkable struggle with terminal brain cancer. She lived the three years following her diagnosis with the vigour, commitment and enthusiasm that she brought to her years as a scholar, teacher, administrator and community builder. Trips to Egypt, around Australia and New Zealand, and the birth of a grandchild, along with completing a collection of her essays and supervising graduate students were all

milestones of those last years which she stretched beyond all predictions about the course the cancer would take.

Varpu was born in Helsinki, Finland and came to Canada as a teenager in 1963. She actively fostered ongoing links with her country of origin, initially sharing her Canadian experiences through letters to her school friends in Finland (which they shared with her shortly before her death), then by making Finnish Canadians the subject of her major research contributions, and founding the Canadian Friends of Finland Friendship society in 1982. Varpu completed her doctoral studies in the Graduate Program in History at York University. Her dissertation became *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada, 1890-1930*, published in 1988. In this book she introduced Canadians to the history of radical, utopian, and defiant Finnish immigrants. Her research reflected the ways she gained the trust of so many Finnish immigrants and Finnish Canadians who were willing to share their remarkable stories with her. It placed her in the pioneering generation of feminist, immigration scholars in Canada and across the world. Numerous other publications highlighted diverse and fascinating aspects of Finnish Canadian. In 2010 the School of Women's Studies at York launched a collection of her essays that Varpu had been working on between her treatment and her travels. *"I won't be a slave!": selected articles on Finnish Canadian women's history* brings together accounts of a the range of remarkable women her research has unearthed – from the utopian women seeking to live a socialist life free from gender inequality on Sointula to her well-known domestic servants who refused to be slaves, who took great pride in their work, yet

possessed that cultural trait of tenacity called, in Finnish, *sisu*, the refusal to be patronized or bullied.

Varpu's contributions were not limited to the written word. She worked as historical consultant at the invitation of filmmaker Kelly Saxberg, and the resulting 2004 National Film Board documentary, *Letters from Karelia* became a critically acclaimed documentary that was shown on national TV in Finland and at film festivals around the world. Until the 75-minute film was released, few knew about the 2,800 young Finnish-Canadians who returned to Russia in the 1930s with dreams of a starting a new society and ended up victims of Stalinist purges. Her publications and the film cemented her reputation as the leading scholar of the social history of Finns, and especially Finnish women in Canada. She also became, as the York University obituary noted, a "memory keeper" in Finnish-Canadian communities. Over several decades, she amassed diaries, family correspondence, financial ledgers, war-relief funding and other organizational records about Finns who immigrated to Canada in the 1880s to early 1900s as a result of economic depression and war in Finland. She collected sound recordings of oral histories, folk music, documentary films, and more than 1,000 books, almanacs and plays published by Finnish authors in North America. Her research into Karelia "fever" took her to Russia where she photocopied rare documents, such as two volumes of a Soviet register of Finnish war crimes, a list of persons found in the mass grave at Karhumäki, and Soviet lists of North American Finns who journeyed to Karelia to help build a socialist utopia. In May 2012 she donated all this to York University's Clara Thomas Archives & Special Collections [York University Y-File, 27 June 2012].

Varpu was a superb university citizen. She first taught in the Atkinson Faculty at York in 1984. Since then she has served in more administrative posts than most university professors. She was Chair of History at Atkinson, coordinator of Canadian Studies at Atkinson, Master of Atkinson and even as Acting Director of the School of Social Work. She was one of the earliest chairs of York's innovative, pan-Faculty, School of Women's Studies. In all those capacities she served tea with enthusiasm and dignity and sought skillfully to navigate conflicts and build respect. Her multiple contributions have been recognized in diverse ways. In 1991, Varpu was awarded the Knight First Class of the Order of the White Rose of Finland, in 2006 she was named a University Professor, and in 2012 she was awarded a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. She will be missed in all the communities that she served so generously.

*Bettina Bradbury*, History and School of Gender,  
Sexuality and Women's Studies, York University